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NEW ORGANISATION TO BATTLE AGAINST RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS

A new organisation has been formed to combat religious cults. Cultists Anonymous has already developed a national network of contacts, although few of its activists are prepared to go public. A representative of the group commented: "The fear we have of reprisals is very real. People do not know what they are taking on when a son or a daughter becomes involved in a cult. It is like living with a bereavement".

Cultists Anonymous estimates that there are around four hundred cults established in Britain. Most of them are of American or Eastern origin. It seeks to advise and help people whose relatives are already involved in cults. It aims to expose the cults' recruiting techniques and to provide those already emeshed with a point of contact in the outside world.

The CA representative confirmed that some of the weird religious groups are offshoots of mainstream religions. They often endeavour to create a respectable image by undertaking some social and charitable work. But in fact they are little more than money-making operations in which recruiting agents use insidious methods to attract the young. "Missionaries" are particularly active in schools and colleges.

The group is usually dominated by a leader or guru who claims to have a special relationship with God. Some even claim to have divine powers. Invariably they demand unquestioning obedience from their followers.

Secretiveness and deception are fostered in members. Once "hooked", they are pressurised to break all ties with their family and former friends. This way they become totally dependent on the group which becomes their new "family". They provide a useful source of cheap labour for the family business which must come before all other interests like relationships, education, career and health. Individuality is stifled by constant supervision, sleep deprivation, inadequate diet and repetitive chanting.

Despite several major scandals, harmful religious

groups, large and small, are on the increase. Cultists Anonymous believe that the problem is "potentially enormous" and not fully realised.

Odd-ball religious groups do not depend on human gullibility alone for their success and prosperity. Virtually any organisation which claims to promote "the advancement of religion" is automatically granted charity status. The notorious Unification Church (the Moonies) is still a charity despite highly damaging revelations that emerged in the course of its unsuccessful libel action against the *Daily Mail*.

It has also been advantageous to groups like the Moonies and the Children of God that the main opposition to their activities comes from other religious organisations. Family Advice, Information and Rescue and the Deo Gloria Trust both have an excellent record of anti-sect work. But their membership consists largely of committed Christians. Victims who are extricated from sects may end up in some equally harmful outfit, albeit one that shows the acceptable face of Christianity.

FAIR and the DGT are handicapped and no doubt often embarrassed by the fact that some of the most pernicious sects are fanatically Christian. One such group is the Northamptonshire-based Jesus Fellowship (Baptist). This group, whose leader is the Rev Noel Stanton, is not part of the official Baptist movement and has recently been expelled from the Evangelical Alliance.

Despite the Fellowship's unsavoury reputation, it has been granted permission by Rugby Borough Council to hold a "Marquee Mission to Rugby" on the Council-owned recreation ground. One councillor said it was "totally irresponsible" to extend these facilities to the sect. But the application was supported by Labour councillors.

Liz Donovan, who is Noel Stanton's secretary, said the purpose of the mission was "to call people to know the love and changing power of Jesus Christ".

The Freethinker

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NEWS

STAGED PROTEST

Humbug and double standards are noticeable traits in Christian crusaders, be they "born again" fundamentalists or those whose brand of religious superstition is on a loftier level. Thus the most ardent "pro-lifers" are usually the first to join in any clamour for the restoration of capital punishment. And those who are continually complaining about violence on television are not averse to threatening a breach of the peace in order to achieve their ends.

Last month officials of the fifth Coventry Festival backed down to such threats and banned performances of a play that was to have been staged by London Women's Theatre Group. *Our Lady* was described in publicity material as "a blasphemous thriller", and the festival organisers declared it would have so incensed Roman Catholics that there would have been a breach of the peace.

Defending the ban, Councillor Dennis Berry, chairman of the Belgrade Theatre Trust, said "the festival is a happy occasion and in no way are we going to let anything like this go on. Anyone who has a Christian belief would not have stood for the sort of thing that was in it". He said that the council office was "bombarded" with telephone calls protesting against the play. But as *Our Lady* had never been seen in Coventry — even by those who imposed the ban — it was obvious that the "bombardment" of telephone calls was a planned operation.

The protesters who complained about the publicity material should have been grateful that they had been made aware of the play's content. No one was preventing them from boycotting *Our Lady*. They should not have been allowed to prevent others from seeing it. A breach of the peace should have been dealt with by the police, not anticipated by Councillor Berry and his colleagues.

Needless to say, local Roman Catholic leaders approved the cancellation of the Women's Theatre Group booking. The Very Rev Benedict Tarbuck said the play "would have offended a good many people, not only of our own faith but from other Christians as well".

Fr Tarbuck's reference to "a good many people" was rather careless. Only two performances were to be given, not in a large theatre but in a school hall. Even these would have been boycotted by sensitive Catholics. At least they were free to avoid being offended. But it is difficult to avoid seeing the ghastly statuary — the centrepiece of which is usually a man being tortured to death on a cross — that is displayed outside many Catholic churches.

AND NOTES

Many people, including some Christians, are offended by this hideous spectacle.

Councillor Berry has announced that there would be "a tighter check on things next year". However, the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* declared in an editorial that "the cold and heavy hand of municipal censorship is just what the festival doesn't need at this critical stage of its short history". It could have added that the festival doesn't need spineless officials, priest-ridden puppets, or a latter day Lord Chamberlain. Councillor Berry may be an excellent chairman of the Council's Transportation and Highways Committee. But he should be given a one-way ticket from the Belgrade Theatre.

• After being banned by the Coventry censors, *Our Lady* had a successful two-week run at the Edinburgh Festival. There were no protests, and the play goes on a national tour later this month.

POPULATION AND POVERTY

The Kenyan Assistant Minister for Information has criticised the country's Roman Catholic hierarchy for "telling its followers that the use of contraceptives is intended to kill unborn babies".

Fr Maurice Lwanga, secretary of the bishops' conference, declared: "The Catholic Church condemns the use of contraceptives because they threaten the life of the unborn and endanger the life of the mother".

He added: "The church fully supports family planning through the natural family planning method".

"Natural" family planning, better known as "Vatican roulette", has caused large numbers of Catholic couples to produce far larger families than they wanted. It is a form of birth control that Kenya, a country with a serious over-population problem, can do without.

In a recent *Times* article, Eric McGraw, a former director of Population Concern, strongly criticised the theory that as more people are educated and their economic horizons widened, they are likely to have fewer children. He said that alongside the development of industry, mineral resources and tourism, the Kenyan Government has carried out a programme of education, housing, health care and land reform. Nevertheless, "Kenya's population is now growing at a rate faster than that of any other country in the world, with a fertility rate averaging out at more than eight children per woman.

"Progress has contributed to population growth.

Improvements in basic health care and nutrition have drastically lowered the infant and child mortality rates and — contrary to conventional expectations — those women who have had some opportunity for education have shown a higher fertility rate than those with no formal education".

Growing pressure of population in Third World countries increases the need for foreign aid, resulting in acute poverty and economic dependency. It is in this context that career celibates are now sabotaging birth control programmes.

• The Vatican announced last month that a leading American theologian, Fr Charles Curran, is to be dismissed from his post at the Roman Catholic University in Washington. Fr Curran, a Professor of Moral Theology, was critical of Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical banning artificial contraception. More recently he has written that contraception, abortion and euthanasia are permissible in some circumstances. Over seven hundred theologians have signed a statement supporting his right to dissent.

IN THE STREET OF A THOUSAND STATUES . . .

The Virgin Mary is on the wing again. She is reported to have touched down in Cairo and is making almost nightly appearances at a Coptic church in a squalid back street of the city.

The church of St Dimiana is a new building which failed to attract worshippers. It is being claimed that St Dimiana, understandably enough, was miffed by such indifference. She therefore persuaded the Virgin Mary — a star attraction to be sure — to make guest appearances.

The Virgin Mary made her entrance in a great light above the church and was seen by a group of women and children. The Coptic faithful, whose brand of Christianity is extremely primitive, were soon in a frenzy of excitement. Every night they have been crowding into the church, praying and chanting in clouds of incense.

"Miracles" have been reported, and the Coptic Pope has declared that it is all a strange phenomenon.

St George and St Dimiana herself have sometimes appeared with the Virgin Mary who has been heard to whisper, "I am she".

Mary does not appear when journalists are around. She is clearly a wise virgin.

In a crackdown on after-hours drinking during the annual Tralee festival, Irish detectives raided a public house in the nearby village of Ardferit at two am. Even at that late hour the bar was thronged. Happy drinkers included the national police band. There is hope for Ireland yet.

FROM OUR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

The Franciscan monastery at Berchtesgaden in Bavaria has closed after nearly three hundred years. It could not find young recruits to replace the few remaining monks who are all over seventy. Growing secularism is said to be responsible for the dramatic decline in the country's monasteries. There are now 180 compared with six hundred some fifty years ago.

A warden at Brighton's Chapel Royal fell and broke her wrist while displaying hymn numbers for a lunchtime service. The accident occurred just after Winifred Hand had put up a hymn number of her own choice. It was number three hundred, which includes the lines: *Let not my slippery footsteps slide, And hold me lest I fall.*

A former American army chaplain has returned his Congressional Medal of Honour, the country's equivalent of the Victoria Cross, as a protest against United States aggression in Central America. Charles Liteky, who left the Roman Catholic Church fourteen years ago and has since married, was awarded the medal during the war in Vietnam.

Masonic organisations have been forbidden the use of Manchester Town Hall. The Labour councillor who proposed a ban declared: "It is easy to dismiss masonic organisations as a group of silly schoolboys who like to mess about in medieval costume. But there are now 800,000 Masons in the country, and this secret and covert brotherhood is a dangerous threat to democracy and democratic structures".

Christadelphians' AIDS Message Denounced

The Gay Humanist Group has received complaints concerning an advertisement that has been appearing in the Personal column of the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, which has a wide circulation throughout the Midlands.

The advertisement is worded: "AIDS and morality — for a recorded talk on what the Bible says ring 021-632 4975". The talk is given by a representative of the Christadelphian Church who tells callers: "AIDS originates with the perverted behaviour of homosexuals and by various means it can spread to innocent people. Society these days tolerates homosexual practices, but in the Bible it is utterly condemned".

The speaker goes on to quote from the New International Version of the Bible, and concludes by offering further free information by post.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Ballina, County Mayo, have been criticised for adding to the town's litter problem. The doorstep disciples have been pasting "God is Love" posters all around the town. Councillor Gerry Moore urged a meeting of the Urban Council: "Write and ask them for the love of God to take down these posters".

Baptists in Fakenham, Norfolk, are boycotting a local store, W. J. Aldiss, because it is employing a clairvoyant. The Rev Peter Lane urged the store to abandon the idea which the Baptists describe as "dabbling in the occult". Shortly after the store opened, the clairvoyant was fully booked by customers wanting their fortunes told.

Forty-six members of the Black Hebrew sect have been told by Israel's Supreme Court that they must leave the country. The court rejected their petition to remain in Israel where they have lived for seventeen years.

The Christian Brothers, Ireland's notorious teaching order of classroom terrorists, is rapidly declining. The large country mansion they bought just over fifty years ago will soon be empty. There were eighty novices in 1955 and only five this year. A spokesman for the order said: "The relevance of religious life isn't seen by young people".

Carlos Oliveria Fontes, a 47-year-old Brazilian civil servant, pushed his arm into a lion's cage at the local zoo "to test God's power". He told his mother: "If God is so powerful, he will not allow the lion to hurt me". A one-armed Mr Fontes is recovering in hospital.

The Gay Humanist Group takes the view that nothing will change the attitude of Bible thumpers like the Christadelphians, but that attempts can be made to undermine their activities and mitigate their evil influence by complaining to those who provide them with publicity. George Broadhead, secretary of GHG, has written to the editor of the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and to the Advertising Standards Authority (Brook House, Torrington Place, London WC1). The Group urges others to do likewise, particularly those offering an AIDS counselling service.

Since Christadelphians are established in many towns throughout the country, GHG thinks it likely that other newspapers will carry similar advertisements. They should be monitored with a view to taking appropriate action.

Thomas Paine Anniversary

R. W. MORRELL

In his brief review (*The Freethinker*, June) of David Powell's recent biography of Thomas Paine, Andrew Whitehead asked why Paine, who did so much to promote the happiness of mankind, "apparently cared so little for the well-being of his second wife. . . ."

We know very little of Paine's personal life, particularly of the years before he went to live in America, and one such gap in knowledge relates to the reason, or reasons, why his second marriage broke down. However, far from being unconcerned about his wife, Paine renounced his legal claim to any funds remaining from the sale of his Lewes business, after debts were met, in favour of his wife. Not long after, he left England for the colonies in America where he was to remain for many years. At the time they parted, Paine was poor and out of work, thus hardly in a position to do much for the welfare of his estranged wife. As our knowledge of the separation and his mother's supposed opinion of him emanates from sources specifically seeking to discredit his character and reputation, care must be exercised in assessing such claims. In terms of hard fact all we really know is that Paine and his wife parted and that he gave her all the material wealth he then possessed.

Mr Whitehead opened his review with a timely reference to the forthcoming 250th anniversary of Paine's birth. Readers will be interested in the programme of events being planned during 1987 to celebrate the occasion.

Naturally there will be no official celebration; we can hardly expect the present Government to display any appreciation for a pioneer of social reform, let alone a critic of the Christian cult and the royalty circus. On the actual birthday of Paine (29 January) there will be a ceremony at his statue in Thetford, and a reception at the Council House by invitation of the Mayor. This will be followed by a lunch at the Thomas Paine Hotel, which incorporates Paine's birthplace. The hotel is also staging a small Paine exhibition. Later in the year there will be a full day celebration in Thetford called the Festival of Liberty. The Ancient House Museum in the town is staging an exhibition from 29 January until early autumn, and a local comprehensive school is to perform a play.

Leicester Secular Society and the Thomas Paine Society are organising a meeting at the Secular Hall, Leicester, on 25 January. The speaker will be Tony Benn, MP.

Later in the year there will be a major meeting at Conway Hall, London, when several societies will co-operate in a celebration of Paine's life and work.

The British Library is considering an exhibition, and Paine will be the subject of the Marx Memorial

Lecture at the Marx Memorial Library, London, on 14 March.

The University of East Anglia at Norwich will arrange the bi-annual Paine Lecture, and the University of Cambridge Extra-Mural Department is planning a one day school.

There will be a small exhibition at Nottingham's Central Library, and similar exhibitions will be held in Alford and Lewes.

Outside Britain events are being organised in the United States, Portugal, West Germany, Australia and South Africa. (One of the States in the USA is considering the possibility of an official Thomas Paine Day, although I have doubts whether this will materialise.)

No country has yet announced an intention to issue a Thomas Paine stamp although the British postal authorities claimed to have considered it. Eire, of all places, decided against one only because (I am privately informed) of Paine's criticism of the Bible!

Mr Morrell, who is secretary of the Thomas Paine Society, would like to hear from local groups which are planning lectures and other events to mark the anniversary. His address is 43 Eugene Gardens, Nottingham NG2 3LF.

Freethinker Fund

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Total for July: £120.10.

A two-headed baby, born in Venezuela, has been baptised under the names of Pedro and Jesus Martinez Fuenmayor. The birth of the baby, who also has two hearts, two stomachs and two vertebrae inside one body with two arms and two legs, has been registered as two individuals after intense legal debate. God moves in a mysterious way.

Confusion in the Creationist Ranks

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

The Biblical Creation Society is celebrating its first decade and last month's *Evangelical Times* devoted numerous column inches to the event. The now familiar scene is set. The credentials of the chairman are set out; E. H. Andrews, is Professor of Material Science in the University of London and a Doctor of Science to boot. We are reminded of John Durant's Darwin Lecture to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where he spoke on "The Myth of Human Evolution". (Curiously they seem to have missed the book he recently edited on *Darwinism and Divinity*.) And of course, the darling of the creationists, Dr Colin Patterson of the Natural History Museum, London, is wheeled out with his now notorious 1981 lecture at the American Museum of National History in which he declared:

One of the reasons I started taking this anti-evolutionary view, or let's call it a non-evolutionary view, was that last year I had a sudden realization. For over twenty years I had thought I was working on evolution in some way. One morning I woke up and something had happened in the night, and it struck me that I had been working on this stuff for more than twenty years, and there was not one thing I knew about it. It's quite a shock to learn that one can be so misled for so long. Either there was something wrong with me or there was something wrong with the evolutionary theory. Naturally I know there is nothing wrong with me.

This final statement is Patterson's considered opinion of himself and is certainly not one with which I for one would happily concur.

We are treated to a foretaste of the Hoyle canard over the supposed forging of *Archaeopteryx*. This was completely demolished by Alan Charig and colleagues in the international journal *Science* earlier this year. But this pathetic nonsense will, I suspect, continue unabated for years to come, rather like the supposed human footprints occurring with those of dinosaurs in rocks of the Cretaceous age, "proving" the contemporaneity of man and dinosaurs (standard reference to the Book of Job, chapter 41, verses 19-21). The creationists themselves now acknowledge that the "human" prints are actually the central portion of dinosaur prints and have nothing to do with humans. But it is, all in all, sufficient for the creationists to conclude "the theory of evolution today is a bruised and defensive philosophy".

However, the *Evangelical Times* is not aimed primarily at readers of *The Freethinker*. It is directed to evangelical Christians, and one of their concerns is the deep split among the creationists who are set in two warring factions over, of all things, the length of the days in Genesis. One faction insists they were 24 hours, the other that they may have been rather longer. It is fascinating that this topic can be discussed with any seriousness in this

day and age, but there it is. Even Professor Andrews had his book banned by one creationist society in the United States, because he suggested that the first Genesis day may not have been of 24 hours duration.

It is perhaps worth recalling the words of James Parkinson, who gave his name to the shaking palsy, in his book *Outlines of Oryctology — an introduction to the study of fossil organic remains*:

The student . . . will perceive decided traces of the vast changes which this planet has sustained; and will see the remains of those beings with which it was inhabited previous to the creation of man. Circumstances will be observed, apparently contradictory to the Mosaic account, but which, it is presumed, serve to establish it as the revealed history of creation. The discordance appears to be removed by the assumption of indefinite periods for the six days of creation: an interpretation adopted by many learned and pious men, and which derives confirmation from innumerable circumstances agreeing with the important fact of certain fossils being found to be peculiar to particular strata; and especially from the remains of widely differing races of animals being found in such situations as evidence that their creation must have taken place at very distant periods.

And that was published in 1822.

The Bishop of Florence, when he remonstrated with Leonardo da Vinci over his views on fossils, declared: "The Almighty created the earth as he saw fit. Since he obviously wished to place fish-bones and shells in mines and inland cliffs, he must have had a reason for it. His will is not to be questioned". This is an argument that is extremely difficult to contest.

But as well as fighting among themselves, the creationists are faced with a still greater enemy in the form of the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship. This body stoutly defends theistic evolution. Professor Andrews considers the Biblical Creation Society's greatest failure has been its inability to get across to the Christian world the centrality of the doctrine of creation for the whole Gospel. Andrews insists "we must be more aggressive in presenting the biblical argument and we must rout theistic evolution". As the *Evangelical Times* comments, "there is no way that the God of the Bible can be reconciled with the God of theistic evolution".

Here one must admit of a degree of sympathy between the creationists and non-theistic (or, as Antony Flew correctly insists, atheistic) evolutionists. The God of the Bible can only be reconciled with the god of theistic evolution if one is prepared to accept his vast and overwhelming incompetence. Most of his attempts at design are woefully inept, and he seems to have spent most of his time just tinkering about with the basic patterns he started off with. He certainly does not inspire much confidence

— certainly I would not be prepared to put myself under his protection, having observed his actions as recorded in the Bible.

It may be an inviting prospect to sit back and enjoy the spectacle of the creationists scrapping among themselves and then having a break to join forces and have a go at their real enemy, the theistic evolutionists. But it is necessary to be on guard all the time against the continuing assaults on rationality. The *Guardian* (19 July) reported the case of Mrs Vicky Foot of Greenville, Tennessee, in the United States, who is opposing through the courts the State school teaching of "secular humanism" on the grounds that this is a violation of her religious beliefs. She and her lawyers argue that "one world government" is anti-Christ, because Jesus will not make his second coming until Armageddon. Military

might and killing of animals is scripturally ordained, while pacifism and friendship with worms and frogs and other living creatures is "proscribed". This case promises to be as famous or notorious as the 1925 "Monkey Trial", also in Tennessee. If the fundamentalists win the day, it will open the flood gates: Muslim and Jew, Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists will be able to demand the same treatment, and the long established State education system of the USA will begin to founder, with serious consequences far beyond its shores.

We need to be aware of these threats from across the Atlantic. We should by now have learnt that in this shrinking world we cannot afford the luxury of not getting involved, in the words of Neville Chamberlain, "because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing".

William Empson, Critic of Christianity

V. S. PETHERAM

The argument with Christianity in *The Freethinker* has usually been conducted on the basis of philosophy or history, rarely in the terms of literary criticism. The name of William Empson deserves to be remembered by rationalists for his assaults on Christian beliefs and on the religious literary critics such as T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis who were influential in the years 1930-60. His cool common-sense, wide knowledge and perky humour, even today, raises the hackles of the devout readers of literature.

Empson, a Yorkshireman, was born in 1906 and died in 1984. At first he studied mathematics, but turned to literature. He became professor of English in universities in China and Japan and finally at Sheffield. He was very influential with his books of literary criticism and wrote fine but difficult poetry. His prose style is easy and forthright with a wealth of learning.

His approach to religion was clearly revealed in a book he wrote in 1961 on *Paradise Lost* called *Milton's God*. It certainly upset the Christian literary critics of the time. Empson claimed that they had misunderstood Milton and that William Blake was right when he said that the poet was on the Devil's side without knowing it. Blake and Shelley "said that the reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad". And this is what Empson sets out to demonstrate.

It is to be doubted that *Paradise Lost* is much read these days, which is a pity. It was once on every Protestant's table beside the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is a magnificent poem and with Empson's book in hand has as much to give to a die-hard atheist as to a lover of poetry.

Properly considered the poem reveals many objections to the belief in a god. Basing himself on moral and rational grounds, Empson points to the tyranny, the use of sacrifice, immorality and sadism that the Christian belief in a deity entails and which modern apologetics have tried to conceal.

The picture of God painted by the religious texts is that of a tyrant demanding complete obedience and the alternative is pain and suffering in hell. To Empson it is the ultimate shame for a person to yield up his conscience to an authority which craves to torture him and who is only to be restrained by a renunciation of thought.

The primitive custom of sacrificing a human being to propitiate a god has been abandoned by all other modern religions except Christianity which retained the idea of ritual murder in the crucifixion. Empson comments: "The trouble was that as soon as you transferred your ancient savage custom to your new metaphysical universal God, people said, 'But why did God want this sacrifice? Mustn't it be because God is very wicked?'" This, of course, is what the Gnostics maintained. To answer this accusation the Christians invented the doctrine of the Trinity with which you abandon any kind of logic. "It is the double talk by which the Christians hide from themselves the insane wickedness of their God. The God would give up torturing humanity if his 'Son' would sacrifice himself".

This thread of sadism runs through Christianity. The early Christians looked forward to the time when they would be in heaven and could sit back to enjoy the suffering of those burning in hell. This religion often combines its sadism with sex. A supposed religion of love has as its symbol a figure suffering in agony. The sex hatred is revealed in the early

denunciation of sex and women and a distrust of marriage.

Empson reminds us that it is with the rise of scepticism, especially the influence of Voltaire, that restrained the original force of Christianity and which today has inoculated even Christians against its more virulent forms. But the evil of that religion still lingers.

To conclude, here are two quotations from William

Empson. First, a definition of a humanist. "A humanist says 'This world is good enough for me if only I can be good enough for it'. But an anti-humanist is committed to saying 'Nothing but heaven is good enough for me, I ought to be there already'".

Secondly, "What is known of the universe so far is astoundingly wonderful and beautiful and I am glad that I was born. Belief in the God of Augustine and Aquinas . . . seems to me blasphemy".

A Royal Flush

T. F. EVANS

Can it possibly be that the Queen listens to satirical radio programmes in which Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister, is addressed as "Your Majesty"? The suspicion that all is not sweetness and light between that two most exalted ladies in the land has been intensified by a controversial Sunday Times report on their differences over the role of the Commonwealth and the Government's attitude to sanctions against South Africa.

The pound in your pocket, to employ a phrase that has been used and abused by politicians and journalists alike, is not simply a token of some, if fluctuating, monetary value: it is a source of useful information. Thus, if we read carefully the lettering that surrounds the head of the sovereign, we find that the inscription says: Elizabeth II: D.G.REG. F.D. This cryptic legend tells us that the said Elizabeth II is Queen by the grace of God and, if this were not enough in itself, she is, presumably as her part of the bargain, defender of the faith as well. The monarchy would thus seem to be where it is, not by right of conquest or as the result of some sordid dynastic deal on shady grounds, which is the way in which most kings have risen to the throne according to the history books of most nations, but as a result of the direct favour of the Almighty. That auspicious, though somewhat nebulous figure, had apparently decided after considering all the evidence available to him, or it might be her, that our present royal lady was the right one for the job and thus contrived to see to it that Stuarts, Hanoverians, the sprigs of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and all the rest arranged their lives in such a way that in 1952 one Elizabeth Alexandra Mary of Windsor became Her Most Excellent Majesty Elizabeth the Second.

Incidentally, any thoughts we may have on the position of the Crown at the present time will fade into obscurity compared with the celebrations, if that is the right word, which will mark the third centenary of the so-called "Glorious Revolution" that took place in 1688. Students of constitutional history will recall that this was the year in which the Catholic James II was chased from the throne and

replaced by the joint monarchy of the Protestants William and Mary. Those who remember the details will know that the events of 1688 contributed to a very great extent to the establishment of the Protestant succession in this country. There may be some in the mainland of Great Britain who have lost sight of these developments, but they are very fresh in the minds of those in John Bull's other island across the Irish Sea, particularly in the northern part of that unhappy land. It is the inspiration of the victory of "King Billy" (William III) that helps to keep still green, or rather orange, the memory of sectarian strife that continues on its miserable, blood-stained course nearly three centuries after.

To the surprise of all, the status of the Queen, her position as defender of the faith and her constitutional authority generally, have all been the subject of very serious and sometimes acrimonious controversy in the last few weeks. The *Sunday Times* has published articles which purport to show that there has been a serious dispute between the Queen and the Prime Minister. There have been rumours in the past of differences between the two ladies. Those with a malicious turn of mind have even gone so far as to suggest that there are two Queens in the country — as in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* — and the world of fantasy of the great Victorian nonsense writer may be the best setting for the extraordinary situation which seems to have arisen. It is said that the Queen is fundamentally out of sympathy with the alleged "uncaring" nature of the policies of Mrs Thatcher and her Government. Some fanciful suggestions have even been made that the general political outlook of Her Most Excellent Majesty is nearer to a kind of Left of centre position than to the conventional conservatism of the upper classes with whom members of the royal family enjoy any kind of social life that their exalted position permits.

It must be noted that the *Sunday Times* is not a Left-wing scandal sheet. It is not even the kind of publication such as *Private Eye*, for example, which specialises in floating rumours which may or may not have any firmer foundation than the desire to create a temporary sensation. The editor of the *Sunday Times* is not an irresponsible scribbler. The

paper is, with very few exceptions, a convinced supporter of conservative values in almost all respects. Its proprietor, Mr Rupert Murdoch, has never shown any propensity to allow his papers to be used for any purpose other than the firmer establishment of the existing order of things. This includes helping rich people to become even richer. It certainly does not include anything like an attack upon the Crown itself, the topmost point of the great pyramid of wealth, social advantage, snobbery and influence that make up so great a part of what is normally understood as "Society".

The main cause that has been put forward for the "dispute" or difference between the Queen and her British Prime Minister is connected with the Queen's position as head of the Commonwealth. It is said that the Queen takes very seriously and values very highly this position, although it is a title that is grounded in no legislative enactment, whether of man or that omnipotent dignitary in whose grace the Queen sits on the throne of the United Kingdom. It is also known that the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for the Commonwealth is, at best, lukewarm, and her attitude sometimes could be diagnosed as fairly fierce hostility.

Matters have come to a head with the need for the British government to declare its attitude towards sanctions against South Africa. The racialist policies of the Pretoria Government cannot be accepted by the vast majority of the member states of the Commonwealth, which, by its essential nature is a multi-racial organisation. The British Government, in its inability to join in sanctions has shown itself the odd man (or woman) out. Clearly this puts the Queen in a difficult position. Nobody however has mentioned the difficulty of her being defender of the faith when there are almost as many faiths in the Commonwealth as there are member states. (An additional irony, with reference to the Queen's duty to defend the faith and one which shows her on the same side as the Prime Minister, is that she is head of the Church of England while her first minister appoints the bishops for that church. If, however, either lady, were she in a private capacity and desired to be ordained as a minister of that church, she would find that her sex make it impossible.)

To a moderately detached observer of the quaintnesses of British life, the most fascinating feature of the entire comedy is not what actually has happened but the various ways in which people have reacted to what they think has happened. Thus, it is probably impossible to say whether the Queen has really conveyed to anyone her views on the Prime Minister, or, if she has, whether that person has passed them on correctly.

What is remarkable is that, on the whole, the press has chosen to condemn the Queen for what she is alleged to have done. Thus, Mr Peregrine Worsthorne, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, a pillar of the far

Right, has actually called on God to "save the Queen from damaging the Crown". She would be saved, he declares, from "her new friends" in the Commonwealth. If it can be imagined for a moment (a feat of some mental dexterity is required here) that the present Prime Minister were of a non-Conservative persuasion, it would be only too easy to conjure up the headlines rebuking her, "an upstart grocer's daughter", for daring to cross her sovereign majesty. Indeed, Mr George Gale, a conservative journalist who is allowed to indulge his propaganda in the anti-Conservative *Daily Mirror*, maintains that the Queen has done her Prime Minister "signal disservice". He ends his article:

The Palace lets it be known that the Queen thinks her Prime Minister does not care enough. This criticism of the grocer's daughter from Grantham coming from the court of the world's richest and most privileged woman, is a laugh.

This must be the first time that such a journalist has said anything that reflected in any way on the wealth and privileges of the Queen and her family.

According to a public opinion poll published in the *Sunday Telegraph* a week after the leading article by Mr Worsthorne, from which a quotation has been given, three in five people thought that the Prime Minister should change her policy on South Africa "if the Queen wished her to do so". At the same time, so deliciously contradictory prove to be the views of people interviewed by opinion pollsters, 55 per cent of people thought that "the Prime Minister's view should prevail in a disagreement with the Queen on an important issue". A further delightful fact, if fact it be, thrown up by these investigations is that 45 per cent of Labour supporters thought that the Queen's view should prevail over that of the Prime Minister whereas only 44 per cent thought that the Prime Minister should have her way. On the Conservative side, the figure for the Prime Minister was 70 per cent and for the Queen 12 per cent only.

To return to our opening thoughts — can it be that the Conservative Party no longer thinks that the Queen is one of them, as she should be if she is appointed by Almighty God? If this is so, it is small wonder that the Empire has gone, that the Commonwealth is going, that *The Times* and Harrods are in foreign hands, that we lose all the Test matches and that, despite the best endeavours of a Tory administration, disaster stalks the land — and all this in the month of a Royal Wedding too.

Television performer Jim Bowen gave his personal view of religion in *Woman's Realm* magazine. He wrote: "I believe there's no God to guide you. You're guided by your own conscience, which is determined by the way you handle your life. . . You have to ask if what you're doing is damaging anybody".

CHILDREN OF THE POOR CLARES: THE STORY OF AN IRISH ORPHANAGE, by Mavis Arnold and Heather Laskey. Appletree Press, 7 James Street South, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 8SR, £8.95

Industrial Schools in Ireland were introduced in 1868, their standards being laid down in Westminster in 1858 and varied in the 1908 Children's Act. St Joseph's, in Cavan, was one such school from 1869 to 1967 when it closed, and this book is based on its story. A sad and sorry story it is for the most part, although the resilience of the human spirit does come through some of the accounts of interviews which the authors had with former pupils at St Joseph's. The book also contains a great deal of information about the regulations and the standards laid down for these schools, regulations which were continued very much as before when 26 counties of Ireland became independent in 1921. In addition, there are summaries of various reports relevant to St Joseph's made between 1936 and 1970.

The purpose of Industrial Schools was to cater for the needs of orphaned, destitute and abandoned children. In some cases the children were in need of such care because of the illness or death of one or both of their parents; but in many cases the children were illegitimate and there is little doubt that, as a result of the stigma attached to illegitimacy, these schools were frequently linked in the public mind with reformatories. Additionally, by the very nature of the reasons for which children were in an institution, they had little contact with the outside world and there were few contacts with former friends or relations. When one adds to this the fact that St Joseph's was run by the Poor Clares, a contemplative order of nuns founded in Assisi in 1212, one has the recipe for disaster which is almost certain to beset any closed community. Indeed, the Poor Clares were the only closed order to be given the care of children in this way; and it seems extraordinary that women so totally cut off from the world should not only have been considered suitable to give these girls (and it was of course for girls only) a substitute for family life, but that the rules and regulations under which they were supposed to operate should have been so little enforced.

There is no point now in looking back too far, for attitudes to children have changed and one cannot judge actions in, say, 1920 by the standards of 1950 or 1986 (though I was sorely tempted to do so while reading this book). But without going back that far, the accounts by 13 girls who spent many years in St Joseph's, and who were born between 1946 and 1954, tell a terrible tale.

As the authors suggest, the fact that Ireland, not having been hit by the 1939-45 war, did not undergo the intense change experienced by the rest of

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Europe, left Irish society and its attitudes largely unaltered by the upheaval that had gone on elsewhere. It is now well known what the effect of lovelessness, brutality, absence of normal emotional development and destruction of self-esteem can do to people as they grow up. The girls at St Joseph's suffered all these things in various degrees, and the account of what happened to them later bears witness to the extent of the damage done. They were beaten, they frequently had clothing quite insufficient for warmth, they were under-fed, and their education was such that many girls were illiterate when they left the orphanage. The only careers for which they fitted were those of domestic servant or laundry worker. Their social and sex education was almost non-existent, with the result that they had no idea of how to cope with the world outside when they started work, sometimes at the age of 12 or 13. Although the Government paid a per capita grant for each child, there was little or no effective inspection or supervision. When an inspection was made there was enough advance warning for conditions to be improved for the occasion. Clearly, there was a tacit assumption that as a religious sisterhood the Poor Clares could be trusted and that their morality was impeccable. Yet it is abundantly clear from many of the accounts that while there were some kind nuns, their vows of obedience made it impossible for them to do anything in the face of the cruelty — and indeed the perversion — of some of their senior colleagues.

The authors devote the first section of the book to the terrible fire in the dormitory block of St Joseph's in 1943 in which 35 girls died. The report of the tribunal of investigation was highly unsatisfactory, and its main comments referred to inadequacies in the fire fighting rather than to the remarkable lack of urgency in attempts to get the children out. The rumour that the delay was due to concern that neither the nuns nor the girls should be seen in their nightclothes was not even raised by the tribunal. At the very least there was gross incompetence, and it is amazing that the Poor Clares should have emerged with little damage to their reputation, particularly as none of the nuns died in the fire.

I was impressed by the way in which the authors have investigated the orphanage and the effort put into contacting as many of those connected with St Joseph's as possible. They present the evidence as objectively as could be done in the circumstances, yet I feel that they make too much of the fire relatively to the repeated and continuous cruelty to children carried on over many years. A fire is a disaster when it involves loss of life; but this fire was a single event

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and had no element of intent about it, whereas the cruelty was deliberate and conscious. It was the cruelty that was unforgivable and should make everyone realise that the adjective "Christian" is by no means synonymous with "loving". Those Christian nuns produced a life for their charges which could lead one of them in later life to say: "The girls from Cavan are all the same. We're warped. We never learn". That message came through from them all, and it is the memory that will remain with me of this book.

CHRISTINE BONDI

I WANT TO GO TO MOSCOW, by Maureen Duffy.
Methuen, £3.50

This is a book with a message, but it is about half sugar coating and half pill. The apparent reason that Methuen has reissued it now is that it is "disturbing and prophetic". It was first published in 1973, and since then a good many of the fictional escapades have come to pass in reality.

Jarvis Chuff is a scrupulously non-violent thief who is sprung from prison by an animal rights organization called All Heaven In A Rage. The whole organization, we learn, is immensely complex with all the cloak-and-dagger paraphernalia of cells, spies, contact people, activists, and so on. At the top are a group of semi-potty eccentrics called angels (as opposed to the cherubs, who are lower down in the management structure). They are a gay phoney vicar, a major and his horsey wife, an elderly ex-opera singer with a Ruritanian title, and her niece, an upper-class gel. Into this odd group, based in a home-counties manor house, comes Chuff with his East End ways. Chuff and the young woman, Philomela, execute various raids planned by the major. They release caged mink, plant a bomb at a military research installation, burn down a slaughterhouse and wreck Smithfield Market. All this is done with painstaking care not to kill or injure anyone.

The didactic function of the novel is cleverly managed by having Chuff ask questions about animal exploitation. He gets explanations and he comments on them, and in the process the reader's consciousness is raised. What keeps the novel from getting too earnest is that the members of All Heaven In A Rage are such stereotyped eccentrics that you can side with them or not, and enjoy the novel either way. Even a reader unsympathetic to animal liberation will not be put off when information and a dollop of characterization go together as in this speech of the doughty old major, who is

planning an attack on "Corton", a thinly disguised Porton Down: "Every weapon is tested on animals first: nerve gases, radiation, napalm. But it's not just the place itself, it's as a symbol of the whole field of research in which animals are used as, one might say, guinea pigs. Millions of them every year, subject to the will of sadists in white coats who've never got over the desire to pull wings off butterflies. I'd horsewhip the lot, I'd . . ."

But all that is the pill; the sugar coating is in the derring-do of the commando raids, the love affair between Chuff and Philomela, and the interesting texture of the novel. As in Maureen Duffy's other novels, there is an interweaving of themes, and here they usually have some tangential bearing on the main idea of animal liberation. Chuff's prison experience reminds him of his school, and later on, slaughterhouses and government buildings also look like prisons; needless to say the animals are all in prisons. Chuff is constantly aware of the upper-crustness of his associates, and the present action is often intercut with scenes from his childhood and memories of his mother.

Maureen Duffy is more *engagée* than most English novelists. *I Want To Go To Moscow* is an interesting novel, but not one of her best, and this edition is unfortunately marred by several noticeable misprints. It is worth reading, however, because Maureen Duffy is a significant writer and any book of hers is worth reading.

SARAH LAWSON

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In the Crucible of Western Civilisation

PHILLIP ADAMS

Israel is one of the largest military powers in the world. Within its borders anyone who is certifiably Jewish enjoys civil liberties and a wide range of freedoms denied to non-Jews. It is a land of division and conflict where religion is a major factor in national life. Journalist Phillip Adams reports on his visit to a land "where the old bury the young".

For forty years the Arab anti-bodies have been attacking the foreign transplant of Israel, trying to eject it from their body politic. Somehow the place survives. Indeed, the Arabs may have unwittingly done Israel the greatest of favours. The second they stop threatening and attacking the tiny country, Israel could fall apart as a result of the entropic forces within.

Far from being a homogenous society of determined Zionists (Onward Jewish soldiers, marching as to war), Israel is a fiasco of factions, an absurdity of internecine squabbles. If the Arabs maliciously declared peace, the Jews would, it seems to me, tear each other apart in their democratic exuberance.

Founded as a secular State by Jewish socialists, Israel is a smorgasbord of religious splinter parties. Taking advantage of an inappropriate electoral system, Right-wing and ratbag rabbis have blackmailed the major parties, winning concessions and doing deals that have converted the Knesset from the merely chaotic into the all but catastrophic.

Forget the Palestinians. The people most intensely opposed to the State of Israel are the Fundamentalist Jews who have lived in Jerusalem since the year dot. They point out in no uncertain manner that Israel isn't scheduled to reappear in the region until the First Coming of the kosher Messiah. And as he hasn't clocked in yet, the Israel created by the secular Jews is both an abomination and a blasphemy. They, alone of all Israelis, are freed of the obligation of serving in the military forces and are left pretty much to themselves.

About the same point on the spectrum are the followers of Kahane, often described as the Jewish fascists, a sort of semitic counterpart to the Reverend Ian Paisleyites. Not for Kahane a brotherhood with the Arabs. He argues with increasing stridency that they have to be evicted. Not only from Jerusalem, but from Israel itself.

Now while Kahane is a great embarrassment to the liberals in Israel, his arguments have the virtue of internal consistency. (That's the trouble with these wretched conservatives — they think their arguments through, whereas we liberals remain

sentimental, sloppy and confused.) He points out that the Arab birth rate leaves the Jews for dead. Both metaphorically and literally. Within a few years Arabs will outnumber the Jews in Israel. Thus, he says, Israel will be destroyed from within.

And although Kahane and company are barely represented in the Knesset, you sense his arguments are gaining currency among Jews tired of tensions and terrorism.

Politicians and journalists were anxious to reassure me about Kahane, saying that he wasn't a significant political force, but the arguments weren't convincing. Clearly, with Islamic fundamentalism intensifying in the region, there will be an ideological response, an echo, within Israel. As Arab leaders call for Holy Wars and claim the mantle of Saladin, Jews will get increasingly anxious and angry and, therefore, more susceptible to slogans and oversimple solutions.

Since the war in Lebanon, young Jews seem to have split into two groups. There are some who, like our Vietnam generation, have turned their backs on the authority of the State and want nothing to do with war. There are others who find both logic and catharsis in Right-wing demagoguery.

Not that anyone in Israel wants another war. This is a country where the old bury the young, the President tells me, speaking in his Irish brogue. Yes, the President of Israel, Herzog, was born in Dublin, reminding me that Israel is a land of expatriates, of immigrants. And a land where people are weary of conflict. So much so that these days the Jewish population is reducing as people give up and leave.

Apart from the deaths of husbands, lovers and children, Israeli women have good reason to detest the constant state of military preparedness. Every man from 18 to 55 is a member of the Israeli armed forces. "It produces the most macho society on earth", a stewardess on El Al complained. "They strut around in their battle fatigues like overgrown boy scouts. Oh, yes, we're in the army too. But don't believe what you see in the patriotic posters. We make the coffee and do the typing. The men in this country think they're God's gift".

Late at night I go to the Wailing Wall where Jews in black hats and long sausage curls bob and weep. The action recalls those nodding plastic birds you used to see, forever dipping their beaks into glasses of water. For hour after hour they nod and mumble, tears of grief running down their faces over events that happened thousands of years ago. The ancient masonry is probably radioactive with religious intensity, after millennia of passion and ululation.

To be in Israel, in Jerusalem, is to be in the

crucible of Western civilisation. Within a few kilometres most of the great religions of the world began. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Muslims, the Jews and the Christians. So many mutually exclusive beliefs that have energised and divided human beings ever since. It's like a theological Chernobyl. Forever on the verge of a melt-down.

As you walk through your choice of Gethsemane or stand on the notional Golgotha, as you look at the place where Christ's body was, according to tradition, washed after his crucifixion, as you watch Arabs entering their mosques and Jews wailing at their Wall and as you count the cost of these conflicting beliefs, you feel like kneeling and thanking God that you're an atheist. *For the religious beliefs that build the mosques and synagogues, and point spires so proudly at the heavens, also dig the deepest of graves.*

A Civilised Censor

John Trevelyan, former Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors and film censor, died on 15 August at the age of 83.

Peter Cotes writes: During John Trevelyan's term of office the powers of the British Board of Film Censors were, on the whole, exercised widely and discreetly; and, as I pointed out in a recent article on film and theatre censorship in these columns, such wide powers had not invariably been used in this manner. The more liberal and progressive film makers had in fact dubbed the BBFC "the BF's" before Trevelyan took over, and there can be no doubt that it suffered from the prejudiced bigotry of a large number of "Whitehousians" who were in charge of deciding what should be seen by filmgoers in the 1920s and 30s. They were valiantly opposed by such workers for a better cinema as Adrian Brunel, Ivor Montagu, Edgar Anstey, Roger Manvell, Paul Rotha, Humphrey Jennings, John Grierson and a few other kindred spirits prepared to do battle with Wardour Street, for so long in harness with the always reactionary lowest common denominator factor in merchandising product.

Trevelyan had been Secretary of the BBFC from 1958 to 1971, but did not become film censor until he was in his mid-fifties when he saw from his office window in Soho Square the change towards the "permissive society" that was reflected in so many of the films he examined. He was born into a distinguished liberal family. His brother, Lord Trevelyan, had been ambassador to Russia, and various ancestors had been colonial governors and chief secretaries of literary bent. The historian, G. M. Trevelyan, and the painter Julian, of the same name, were his cousins. His humane views had been inherited and practised earlier on in his life as an educationist, both here and abroad.

John Trevelyan was often blamed for opening the door still wider to the "anything goes" school of film making. He was furiously criticised for many of his decisions, particularly when he granted a certificate to the erratic and pretentious hokum, *The Devils*. But this wise and in many respects cautious examiner — who had landed his job as Secretary of the Board by criticising its attitude in not understanding the effect of films on children — was in fact a hater of licensed violence. Upon his retirement he was to write of the importance of treating adults in a democratic society as adults, and to stop banning and cutting films for adult audiences.

John Trevelyan was described when he died as "that rarest of breeds, a censor who did not believe in censorship". Yet he cut a figure far removed from that of the popular rebel so often stereotyped in the popular press, being well-mannered, considerate, soft in his approach, but firm of attitude where moral issues were concerned. He helped to raise the age limit for X films from 16 to 18, introducing at the same time the A category for films unsuitable for children under 14, whilst "unlocking the door" for a number of films made by the Boulting Brothers; also *Room at the Top*, *The L-Shaped Room*, Warhol's *Flesh* and my own modest little film, *The Young and the Guilty*, which had previously been seen and edited severely in a different form when produced "live" on television.

A kind and sympathetic man, his lean, bespectacled and studious look cloaked the soul of an artist. He resembled more a typical civil servant than the enlightened and imaginative humanist he invariably turned out to be, both in his decision making and his approach to artistic matters and social problems. He supported many progressive causes and was a prominent member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

One of his last writings was in a book to which he contributed an Introduction (*Erotic Theatre*, by John Elson, Secker & Warburg), and here in his last sentence his philosophy was expressed well enough to stand as an epitaph: "Such words as *obscenity* and *pornography* could well become archaic and I believe that nobody would be the worse for it. The theatre can teach us something about life and about human problems, and if it can make us understand more about the human condition it can help us all in our search for truth".

The Indian Express newspaper reports that a group of religious zealots dragged a youth into the village temple at Uttar Pradesh, northern India, and beheaded him. They placed his head on the altar as a sacrifice to a Hindu goddess. It is also reported that mentally ill people are being taken to a Muslim shrine in western India where they are chained and beaten to exorcise evil spirits.

LETTERS

CONCEPTUALIZING THE UNIVERSE

Harry Stopes-Roe's objection, in the July Freethinker, to the emphasis I put on holistic (wholistic) thinking in my book, "Instead of God", seems to boil down to his statement that "We cannot conceptualize the universe as a whole". But we can, if we go the right way about it.

The starting point is to get out into the open country on a clear night, lie down, and just look up at what is out there. Most of the vast display above us consists of the stars of "our" galaxy. We can see only about 6,500 of them with the naked eye, but the astronomers tell us the stars in our galaxy total around a hundred billion (100,000,000,000).

Too much for the human mind to grasp? Certainly not! We all have something like ten billion cells in our brains. OK, let's get the feel of that, sense our own brains for a moment, be aware of what we are. Now imagine we are in a discussion group with nine others. The total of the brain cells in that group is about the same as the total of stars in our galaxy.

To move on: if, when looking up at the night sky, we have the best optical and radio telescopes at our disposal, we shall also be able to see faint, distant objects between the gaps in the stars. They are some of the other galaxies. There are about as many galaxies in the universe as there are stars in our galaxy. So the total of observable stars in our expanding universe is 10 billion multiplied by 10 billion. Incomprehensible? Not at all. Go to the desert — or a beach — and pick up a few grains of sand. Examine them, come to terms with them. You now have insight into the nature of the whole desert — or beach. Or, indeed, of all the deserts and beaches in the world.

Similarly, we can comprehend the enormous distances between stars and galaxies. Space is just more and more of the same going on, and on, AND ON. If you can understand an inch you can understand a foot — a mile — a 100 miles — a 1,000 miles — a million miles. Two trips to the moon and back equal approximately a million miles. Our sun is 93 million miles away (or $8\frac{1}{2}$ light minutes, since light travels at 186,000 miles a second). A thousand light years, quite a short cosmic distance, is just more and more of the same, comparable to a desert in relation to a grain of sand. No need to be mentally intimidated by a multiplication of the familiar!

Now let us consider matter in the universe. Matter is energy organized as mass. Its common universal forms are as gas, liquid or solid. And all three are made up of — or from — about 100 different kinds of atoms, each of which is ultimately composed of varying dynamic patterns of sub-atomic particles.

Carrying on from there, we note that atoms combine to form molecules of various substances. The biochemical systems, often called "living matter", are also made up from molecules, including very large ones — the protein molecules. Not all that incomprehensible surely?

And the basic forces of nature that everywhere shape the universe and keep it going? There are only four of these: gravity, electro-magnetism and two forces — so-called "strong" and "weak" — that operate at the sub-atomic level.

Understanding the universals outlined above, and keeping them all in awareness at the same time, gives us the basis for conceptualizing "the universe as a whole". Any part of this vast complex warrants close study, which is where "reductionist thinking" comes in. On the other hand, you can look at the parts from

the perspective of the whole. That is the valuable function of "wholistic thinking". What "synthetic thinking" is — to follow Harry Stopes-Roe — I am not sure. At best, "synthetic" in this context is ambiguous.

In addition to all the above, of course, we need to take into account the conceptualizing agent — the human brain. But that is another story.

JAMES HEMMING

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. E. Parker (August) misunderstands me. I was not defending those who "go around killing people", but merely trying to point out whether a person is considered a terrorist or a freedom fighter depends upon one's political standpoint. De Valera, Begin and Mugabe were all regarded as the former by their opponents and as the latter by their supporters, while in South Africa today, Nelson Mandela is a terrorist in the eyes of the Government, but a freedom fighter in the eyes of the African National Congress.

In reply to another correspondent in the same issue, Stuart Campbell is wrong in stating that "no one has ever suggested that Jesus' tomb was not empty". In his book entitled *Jesus*, Charles Guignebert, the French New Testament scholar points out that the only evidence we have that the tomb was empty are the historically unreliable Gospels — the earliest Christian writer on the alleged resurrection, Paul, knows nothing of it — and argues forcefully that the empty tomb story was invented far from Jerusalem many years after the crucifixion, when it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to do any research at the site, even if that could be identified.

JOHN L. BROOM

ODDLY ENOUGH

While reading Phyllis Graham's excellent "The Jesus Hoax" in my local library I saw that alongside

How odd
of God
To choose
The Jews

on page 74, a previous reader had written
It's not so odd
The Jews made God.

DAVID SHAW

OBITUARY

Mr R. MacQueen

Ron MacQueen, who has died at the age of 82, was a prominent figure in pre-war British cycling. He served on the governing bodies of many cycling organisations, and was one of the most famous time-keepers in 24-hour events. He was cycling correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* in the 1930s.

A staunch freethinker for most of his life, Mr MacQueen was well known among Manchester secularists. Together with his wife, who died eight years ago, he was a member of the old Manchester branch of the National Secular Society.

Mr MacQueen lived for many years in the Merseyside area, and had recently moved to Warwickshire.

There was a secular committal ceremony at the Mid-Warwickshire Crematorium, Leamington Spa.

"Mad" Disciple Jailed

Sentences of up to twenty years imprisonment and fines of over \$400,000 have been imposed on Ma Anand Sheela, former personal secretary to the Indian guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. A court in Portland, Oregon, also sent two other followers of the guru to prison. They were Ma Anand Puja, a native of the Phillipines, and Ma Shanti Bhadra, from Perth in Australia.

The three women had pleaded guilty to a number of serious crimes at a commune in Oregon controlled by Ma Anand Sheela. They attempted to murder the British-born Dr George Meredith, the guru's personal physician, by injecting poison into him. He became seriously ill but survived after hospital treatment. They also attempted to poison two county officials.

The trio used salmonella to cause a food poisoning epidemic in which over seven hundred people became ill. They did so to prevent voters from taking part in an election during a power struggle between the commune and local residents.

Guru Bhagwan Rajneesh was expelled from the United States last year and the Oregon commune has been disbanded. A former follower of Ma Anand Sheela said "she became more than a little mad".

Glasgow Exhibition

Margaret Henderson writes: An exhibition on humanism designed to appeal particularly to young people has opened at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. It has been organised for Glasgow Humanist Society by Floris Greenlaw, a committee member of the society and a member of the Scottish Humanist Council.

"We have contacted some national figures like Claire Rayner and George Melly in an effort to interest young people, and we hope to have inquiries from this age group which might lead to a branch of the Humanists at universities or colleges in Glasgow", said Mrs Greenlaw.

The exhibition features prominent Scottish Humanists like Guy Aldred, Gilbert Murray, Lord Boyd Orr and Lord Ritchie Calder, as well as rationalists through the ages from Epictetus to Noel Coward and Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Also on show are blow-ups of the leaflet for young people recently prepared by the Scottish Humanist Council, the quiz from the Humanist Dipper, and the *Sunday Standard* opinion poll on religious beliefs. There is information about IHEU conferences and a copy of the Statement on Defence approved at this year's Scottish Humanist conference.

The exhibition will be at the Mitchell Library until the end of October.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 5 October, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Public Meeting.

Edinburgh Freethinkers Group. Information regarding fortnightly meetings for younger humanists is obtainable from Box 120, First of May Bookshop, 43 Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 25 September, 7.45 pm. Barbara Smoker: What's This Humanism?

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Bournemouth. Information obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242 39175.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

National Secular Society. Annual outing on Sunday, 14 September. Details from NSS office, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266.

Norwich Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Philip Howell, 41 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NE, telephone Norwich 47843.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 28 September, 3 pm. Annual Reunion.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 October, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Public meeting.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 15 October, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Annual General Meeting.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone 01-828 3631.

Worthing Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Bob Thorpe, 19 Shirley Drive, Worthing, telephone 62846.

Landowners in India's eastern province of Orissa have found a way to frustrate land reform programmes. They are transferring ownership of land and farm animals to family gods in order to avoid surrendering their property to landless peasants.

Successful Humanist Conference in Oslo

The Ninth World Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union was held last month in Oslo, Norway. There was an excellent attendance of 500 people from 25 different countries, and the Congress was given substantial coverage in the Norwegian media.

Jim Herrick writes: The Congress theme, "Humanists Say Yes to Life", was developed in a series of lectures, workshops and discussions. Professor Sir Hermann Bondi from the UK gave an introductory speech in which he stressed that "contrary to what many religious people accuse us of, we are not starry-eyed about our species, but, since we are all that is available, we must accept ourselves as we are". He also criticised the divisiveness of sectarian education.

Three outstanding lectures were given by Marilyn French, the American feminist author of *The Woman's Room*, Dr Johan Galtung, a Norwegian who has been professor of peace research at several universities, and Dr Gerard Larue, an American former professor of theology who has written a series of books with critical analysis of the Bible and Christian dogma.

Marilyn French spoke of "Self-respect, a Female Perspective" and captivated the audience with her persuasive rhetoric. She painted a picture of human nature in which "mind and body, human and nature, and human with all other humans are all unalterably connected". She emphasised the importance of pleasure for self-respect: "For people raised in the self-denying, self-hating morality of patriarchy, freedom can be achieved only if we cease to exalt power — the dominant good in our world — and find our good in pleasure".

Dr Galtung's topic was "Solidarity: Ethics in a Global Perspective". He took from the idea of ecological balance the assumption of the combination of diversity and symbiosis. The same balance, he suggested, is important for human societies, "with the best societies today being those that combine capitalism and socialism" and at the world level "peaceful co-existence between different systems". He stated that "for this to happen no religion or ideology can see itself as holder of eternal, universal truth, a sickening idea particularly pronounced in cultures that have been dominated by monotheistic religions".

"Survival", with reference to the rise of apocalypticism, was Dr Gerard Larue's subject. The view that God is about to bring the world to an end has often been ignored by mainline churches, but it has become "the battle-cry of evangelical fundamentalism. . . The problems with apocalyptic thought include its negativism, its low opinion of human worth and human potential, its determinism that

supports its spirit of futility and defeatism, its lack of appreciation of the natural environment and its enthusiastic endorsement, by some, of nuclear war".

The International Humanist Award was presented jointly to Professor Clauss of Belgium in recognition of his philosophical contribution especially in the educational field, and the Atheist Centre in India. In accepting the award on behalf of the Atheist Centre, Mrs J. Mythri, daughter of Gora and Saraswati Gora, the Centre's founders, said: "True secularism necessitates separation of education and religion, culture and religion, social work and religion. In one phrase, all aspects of life must be separated from religion".

A motion about the sexual exploitation of children was proposed by the Human-Ethical Association of Norway. It was passed with overwhelming support and called on world governments "to intensify their efforts to stop cruel exploitation of children".

The Norwegian Human-Ethical Association is one of the most numerous (28,000 members), most active, and well-organised humanist movements in the world. One of the most famous of Norwegian humanists was the Arctic explorer, Fridtjof Nansen, who wrote in an essay, *What I Believe*: "It is necessary to build up a new, sound moral code in harmony with modern views, freed as much as possible from superstition, and based on the old principles of solidarity and love. It should be clearly understood that moral rules are not commands which have to be obeyed through fear — the lowest instinct in man — but they are good in themselves, because their observance furthers the welfare of men in this life, and has nothing to do with the egotistical idea of an individual salvation in another world".

• A full account of the IHEU Congress, including texts of some of the speeches, will appear in the Autumn issue of the *New Humanist*.

Eric Moonman, chairman of a Board of Jewish Deputies research committee, says that disenchantment with religion has contributed to a decline in the number of British Jews. He was commenting on a report, *British Jews in the Eighties*, which shows that the number of Jews in Britain has fallen by a quarter in the last thirty years. Only half of them now marry in the synagogue. The report blames the low rate for synagogue marriages on emigration, civil marriage among Jews and new alternatives to conventional marriage. But the declining Jewish population is more religious and enrolment in Jewish schools has increased.